
No Compromise with the IWW

by Ernest Untermann

Published in *St. Louis Labor*; whole no. 624 (Jan. 18, 1913), pg. 7.

The issue between the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World is drawing toward a crisis.

It is not the fault of the Socialist Party that there is any issue between the two organizations.

Neither has the issue been made by any so-called leaders in both organizations. These conditions are for the present and for the immediate future beyond the control of either organization.

We shall not get rid of this issue by the expulsion of a few individuals, nor by the proclamations of any individual, nor by the Whereases and Resolveds of so many locals.

It will be impossible to avoid the expulsion of individuals who through word and deed confess that they are not in harmony with the fundamental principles of the organization: Neither can we get along without frank declarations of individuals and locals on both sides. Such actions will help clarify the issue, but will not settle it.

So far as I am personally concerned, I do not care to fight out this issue along personal lines. I want the two organizations to settle it as it must be settled, by the evolution of masses, not by the quarrels of a few individuals who happen to be well advertised.

But as each individual must settle it with himself or herself in order to take part in the deciding activity of the mass, I feel that it is time for me, personally, to declare publicly where I stand in this matter.

When the IWW was organized in Chicago, it proclaimed principles with which every scientific Socialist had to agree.

There was a possibility of finding fault with the method by which these principles were called to the public attention, but no scientific Socialist could deny that industrial unionism was destined to become

a dominant force in labor organization on the economic field, and that this form of organization must be supplemented on the political field by the Socialist Party.

This was the unequivocal meaning of the Chicago manifesto.

Many members of the Socialist Party endorsed that manifesto and either joined the IWW on the strength of it, or at least assumed a sympathetic attitude toward the new organization, and expressed this sympathy on many occasions by active support.

I was among those who signed the Chicago manifesto of the IWW.

My reasons were publicly stated at the time. Summed up in a few words, they were as follows: Hundreds of thousands of bona fide labor unionists had left the American Federation of Labor. It was not the province of the Socialist Party to sift the right and wrong in the quarrels of labor unionists among themselves. I simply recognize the fact that there was a division of labor unionists over the best method of economic organization, and if one of these organizations recognized the principle of industrial unionism as the coming one, and at the same time realized that the Socialist Party was the only political organization which should be supported by these new industrial unionists, I, as a scientific Socialist, had every reason to say they were right, if they asked me for my individual opinion.

At the same time I also warned both sides that my endorsement of the principle of industrial unionism did not commit me to an absolute endorsement of the IWW and to an absolute disapproval of the AF of L.

My conception was that the course of events would in due time demonstrate whether the principle of industrial unionism would enforce itself through the growth of the IWW and the corresponding disintegration of the AF of L, or the amalgamation of the IWW with the AF of L. I expressed my full faith in the Western Federation of Miners, and foretold that the IWW would grow or decline as an ally of the Socialist Party according to whether the Western Federation of Miners would stay with the IWW or withdraw from it.

At the very time when the framers of the Chicago Manifesto were in session I warned them through an article in the *Voice of Labor*, the organ of the American Labor Union, to be on their guard against the emissaries of the defunct Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, and foretold that an admission of these emissaries to the IWW would signify

the disruption of the organization and its deviation from its original aims.

One year after the Chicago conference [Jan. 2, 1905], at the 1st National Convention of the IWW [June 27-July 8, 1905], the anarchistic elements that had been admitted, in spite of all warnings, disrupted the IWW and almost disrupted the Western Federation of Miners. As a result, the Western Federation of Miners withdrew from the IWW, wisely realizing that a compromise with the disruptionists would spell disaster.

From the 1st National Convention to the present day the IWW has more and more degenerated into an enemy of the bona fide labor unions and of the Socialist Party.

Industrial unionism has made progress, not through the efforts of the IWW, but in spite of the IWW.

The Socialist Party has become stronger, not through the assistance of the IWW, but in spite of all efforts of the IWW to disrupt our political organization.

In at least two national conventions the Socialist Party has been compelled to defend itself against attempts of the IWW emissaries to pledge our political organization to a course that would have meant ruin.

Today the IWW has utterly abandoned the principles of the Chicago Manifesto. Instead of organizing the working class industrially, the IWW is spending most of its time in attempts to disrupt the bona fide labor unions. Instead of assisting the Socialist Party, all the prominent organizers and editors of the IWW are fighting us.

The Socialist Party has at all times been loyal to the principles laid down in the Chicago Manifesto. Whenever any member of the IWW has been in trouble, the Socialist Party has come to the rescue with its press, its national organization, its funds, its speakers, to save the IWW members from the gallows, from the jail, from persecution, just as we have assisted labor unionists of other organizations.

At no time has the Socialist Party made any attempt to disrupt the IWW.

Every scientific Socialist understand that there are fundamental social conditions which necessitate the existence of such an organization as the IWW.

Every scientific Socialist understand that there are fundamental social conditions which necessitate the existence of such an organization as the IWW. Every scientific Socialist recognizes today that even

the anti-political attitude of the IWW has its roots in social conditions which deprive hundreds of thousands of workers of the opportunity to use the ballot. But while we recognize the necessity for the existence of the IWW we cannot stand still and submit without resistance to the disruptive policies of people who have shown by word and deed that they have not a very clear conception of the forces of social evolution.

We are not going to waste our time in the fruitless attempt to kill an organization which must necessarily exist as a product of conditions outside of our control. We know that the conditions that produced the IWW will in due time kill it, when it shall have run to the logical conclusions of its anti-evolutionary policies.

For this reason I said at the national convention of the Socialist Party in 1910 [National Congress, Chicago, May 15-21, 1910] that the IWW was doomed to ruin if it persisted in its anarchistic policies. And for the same reason I told the IWW delegates in unmistakable language that their tactics had made it impossible for me to take any more interest in their organization.

Since 1910 the IWW has not made any progress in the direction of a policy that would insure its lasting success on the economic field. It has become a breeding place of anarchists, immature fledgelings, mouth-revolutionaries, slanderers, and panderers to shady characters. As a social force its influence is confined to spontaneous and noisy machinations that leave no constructive results of any importance.

There are still some Socialist locals that, out of mistaken sympathy and a false conception of solidarity, work with some sections of the IWW, but the Socialist Party in those locals is almost without exception in the hands of members who have a very hazy conception of scientific Socialism and who, for this reason, make up in loud mouthings what they lack in actual knowledge. The Socialist Party has always gotten the worst of such friendly cooperation with the IWW.

In the meantime the Western Federation of Miners has joined the AF of L. There is more promise of industrial unionism henceforth in the AF of L than there is in the IWW and ever will be in the IWW. There is more promise of an effective cooperation of the increasing number of industrial unionists inside of the AF of L with the Socialist Party than there has been on the part of the IWW throughout its short-lived career.

We are within measurable distance of the period when the progressive and revolutionary members of the AF of L will endorse the

Socialist Party and relegate the reactionary leaders to the limbo of oblivion.

On the other hand, there is no prospect whatever that the IWW will ever learn the art of marching separately on the economic field and striking in unison with all class-conscious workers at the box. The spokesmen of the IWW have shown themselves loud in noise, but weak in an effective understanding of the fundamental facts of social evolution. It is my firm conviction that industrial unionism and Socialism has a great future in the ranks of the members of the AF of L, and that in proportion as this development continues the IWW will disintegrate, because the only active force that can hold it together, the Socialists, will withdraw from it more and more and throw it into the discard along with the ST&LA and other organizations that were the work of misunderstood scheming rather than of consciously grasped evolution.

With this conviction in my mind, I can only welcome the recent utterances of men whom the Socialist Party has saved from the gallows and who immediately rewarded us by slandering and attacking us.

No scientific Socialist can afford to pander to an organization that carries within itself the germs of destruction. Leave the IWW to its fate. It cannot be saved. And let us be more careful in the future how we spend the funds of our organization in bringing relief to so-called leaders of the IWW. I have yet to hear of any IWW local that ever subscribed funds to the Socialist Party when our members were in trouble. We have had too many IWW martyrs calling for money from Socialist locals, while their emissaries were at work disrupting these same locals. While we have spent our time, strength, funds in helping such disrupters, many a position already gained by us had to be evacuated and will have to be regained by hard struggle.

The Socialists that are still in the IWW will leave it sooner or later and will be wiser for their experience. The IWW disrupters that are still in the Socialist Party will soon find that they are wasting their time and will stop their work as soon as their meal ticket runs out.

And remember, advertised martyrdom is no proof of sterling revolutionary qualities. Government spies in Russia, Germany, and France posed as martyrs, went to jail, were clubbed — according to plans previously arranged with the capitalist authorities. Martyrs who fight the Socialist Party are either ignorant and unfit for positions of

trust, or they are disrupters for pay. In either case, they do not deserve our support.

If direct action is a good principle for the IWW in its dealings with the Socialist Party, give the disrupters a taste of that same principle.

It worked wonders in the old SLP ad ST&LA. It will work well against the IWW disrupters.

They don't believe in political action by means of the ballot box. They have no place in an organization that works principally through the ballot.

No compromise with the IWW!

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · December 2014 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.